

Vampires, Dracula and Discovery

In folklore around the world there are ghosts that suck blood. These ghosts are called vampires. In some stories vampires can turn into something else. Animals, pumpkins or tools are some of these things. One book has a vampire that turns into a bat. His name is Dracula. Dracula was created by Brahm Stoker in 1897. Dracula has been famous ever since.

Many people think that a vampire turning into a bat is a very, very old story. Before Dracula was written stories probably did not have vampires that turned into bats. So how did the story of Dracula get started? There was an amazing discovery. South America had bats that ate only blood! They were named vampire bats. Maybe Brahm Stoker was inspired by a real discovery.



A poster for an opera about Dracula (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

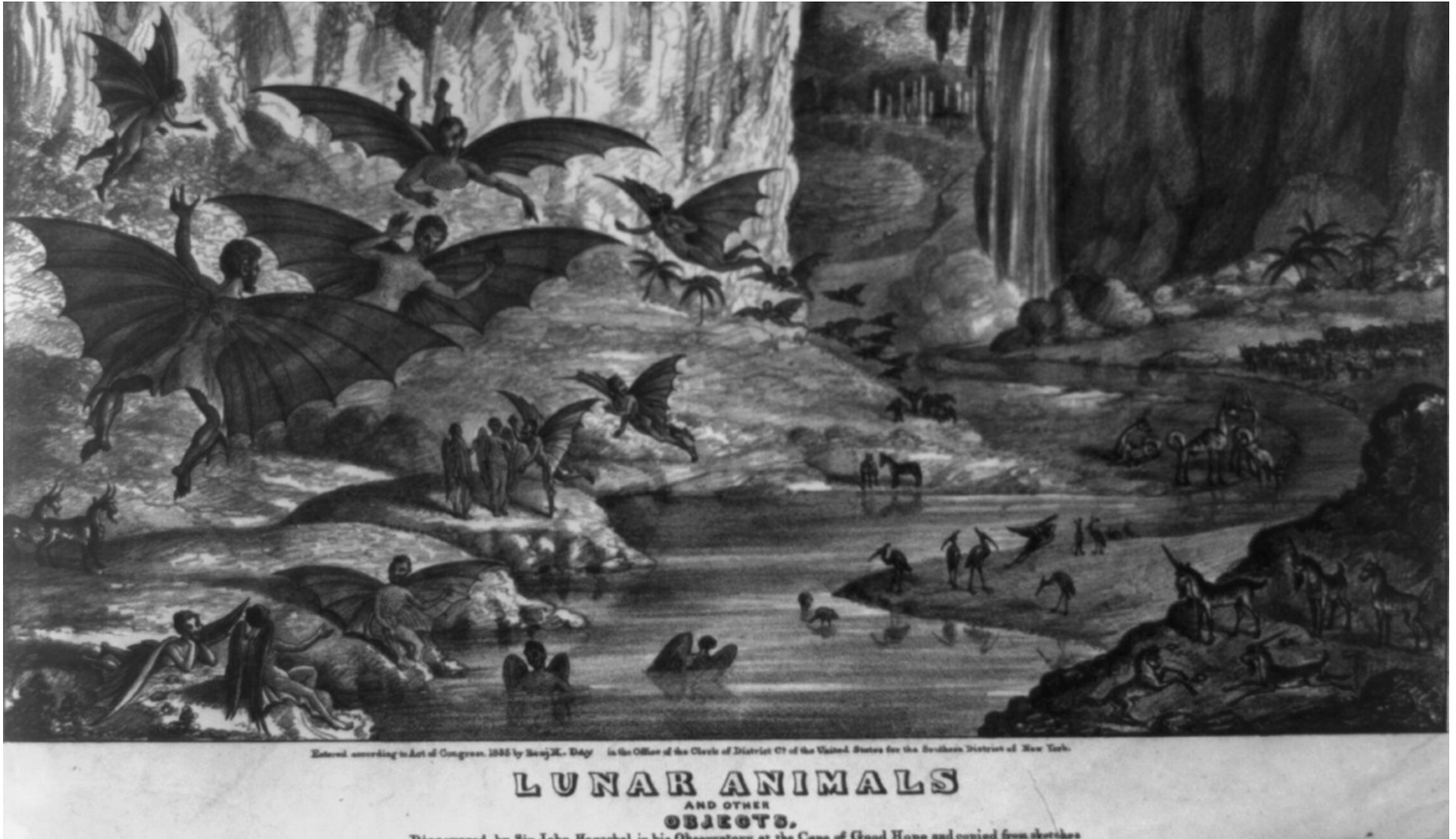


Dracula is set in Transylvania. Transylvania is an area in the country Romania. This country is in Europe.

Man-Bats on the Moon?

In 1835 an article was written. This article was in a New York newspaper. The article told about a new discovery. A science journal published it.

How was this discovery made? A top scientist used a newly made telescope. He looked at the moon. He wrote of a fantastic sight. He saw fields of flowers and a lunar forest. He even saw a Man-Bat! Many people were sure life had been found on the moon. It captured the imaginations of many. Eventually people found out that it was a trick.



(Courtesy of the Library of Congress)



New York City, United States of America

Ball Game

In many Native American legends, bats are important. One story told by the Cherokee tells how the bat came to be. Two mouse-like creatures wanted to play a game. There were two teams, the birds and the animals. The animal team included a bear, a deer and a turtle. The mouse-like creatures asked if they could play with the animals. The animals made fun of the mouse-like creatures because they were small. They chased the mouse-like creatures away.

Then the mouse-like creatures talked to the captain of the bird team, the eagle. They asked the eagle if they could play. The birds felt bad for the creatures. The birds decided to make wings for each of them. They took a groundhog skin from a drum. Stretching the skin from one leg to the other they made wings. In this way they created the first bat. Then the birds made the first flying squirrel. With the help of the bat and flying squirrel the birds won the ball game. The winning goal was scored by the quick bat.



The United States of America



Drawing by Charles Livingston Bull (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

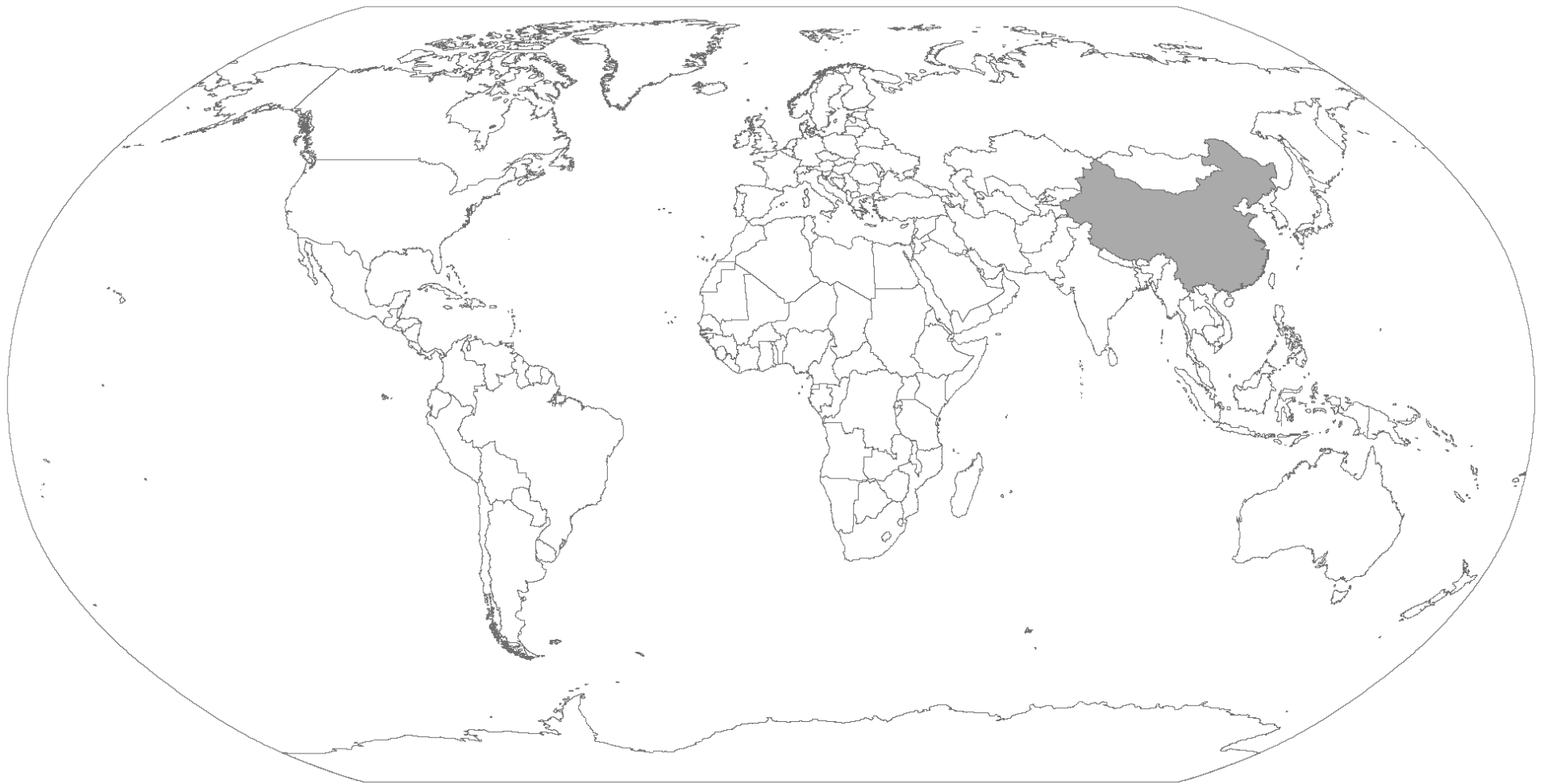
Happiness, Luck and Bats

In China the bat is a sign of good luck and happiness. The Chinese word for bat and happiness are said the same way, “wu” (woo). The Chinese symbol “wu-fu” (woo-foo) has five bats. Their wings are outstretched, touching at the tips. This forms a pentagon.

Each bat stands for one of the five kinds of happiness. The five kinds of happiness are: health, long life, wealth, virtue and natural death. In the center of the bats is the Chinese symbol for longevity. This is used as a logo by Bat Conservation International. This group works to promote understanding of bats worldwide.



The symbol for longevity is black
The bats are red



China

The Battle of the Birds and Beasts

People in Australia and Nigeria tell a bat legend. The Modoc also have a story about a bat. The Modoc lived in and around Lava Beds National Monument. All of these people have a similar story.

There is a war between the birds and the beasts. During the battle the bat changes sides. When the beasts look like they are winning the bat stays on their side. The bat switches to the side of the birds when they seem to be winning. The battle continues and the bats keep changing sides. Eventually the birds and beasts decide to stop fighting. Because of his dishonesty the bat is rejected by all.

This is the Modoc version of the legend.

Once there was war between beasts and birds. Bat was on birds' side. In the first battle, the birds were badly beaten. As soon as Bat saw that the battle was going against them, he crept away, hid under a log, and stayed there till the fight was over. When the animals were going home. Bat slipped in among them.

After they had gone some distance, they saw him and asked one another: "How is this? Bat is one of the men who fought against us?"

Bat heard them and he said: "Oh, no! I am one of you; I don't belong to the bird people. Did you ever see one of those people who had double teeth, you can say that I belong to the bird people. But I don't; I am one of your own people."

They didn't say anything more; they let Bat stay with them.

Soon after, there was another battle; in that battle birds won. As Bat's side was getting beaten, he slipped away and hid under a log. When the battle was over and birds were going home, Bat went in among the birds.

When they noticed him, they said: "You are our enemy; we saw you fighting against us."

"Oh, no," said Bat, "I am one of you; I don't belong to those beasts. Did you ever see one of those people who had wings?"

They didn't say anything more; they let him stay with them. So Bat went back and forth as long as the war lasted. At the end of the war, birds and beasts held a council to see what to do with him. At last they said to Bat: "Hereafter, you will fly around alone at night, and you will never have any friends, either among those that fly, or those that walk."



The United States of America, Nigeria and Australia



Unhappy Birds

The Karanese of India have a tale about bats. In this story bats began as unhappy birds. These birds went to the temples and prayed to be turned into people. Their prayers were partly answered. They received teeth, hair and human faces.

But the rest of their body still looked like a bird. This made them very ashamed to meet the other birds. According to this legend this is why bats only come out at night. Bats now return to the temples during the day to pray to be turned back into birds.



India